



The Network for Peace through Dialogue Why Dialogue? (and when, and how, and where?)

How and Why Dialogue in a University-Based Setting?:

Creating Dialogue Programs in Schools, Clubs, and Communities

American University Dialogue Development Group

[The Dialogue Development Group](#) (DDG), a student-led organization at American University in Washington, D.C., engaged participants in an interactive session on creating a dialogue program in a university or other community setting. DDG's roots in the International Peace and Conflict Resolution Program at American University, their vision, goals, and structure were shared, along with the challenges and successes they've experienced and the lessons they've learned. Panelists included dialogue participants, and the session was led by dialogue facilitators Jared Ordway and Maria Jessop. Workshop participants worked in teams to identify resources and generate preliminary steps needed for creating a dialogue program in their chosen setting, such as a school, a church, a club, or community organization.

Below are one participant's notes on this workshop:

Dialogue Development Group- a student-run organization on campus

Maria- Why do we dialogue?

After taking part in a class, realized that there is so much fear around dialogue.

Dialogue surfaces fears and provides a safe space.

We grow up in a culture of judging and evaluating, and dialogue enables you to have a human connection.

Stephanie- Graduate of International Communication. Found in her program that dialogue was a method of healthy communication. Three principles of dialogue are: active listening, suspending judgment, speaking from your own personal experience.

Rachna- Went to school in South India that encouraged inquiring and deep thought about our conditioning. Went to University of Peace in Costa Rica and participated in a dialogue between First and

Third World students. Came away from the dialogue with a deep interest in having more of these experiences. Dialogue for her is now like a political act because it brings together people in a dynamic space. Jared- Has been involved in community mediation and peace building. Is part of International Peace and Conflict Resolution Program. While students are bright and wonderful, many were dealing with interpersonal relationships. Often there were no opportunities for students to come together to discuss what they truly felt.

Mohammed Abu-Nimer, a professor at AU, taught a course on dialogue, and the students who founded the dialogue program came out this class. They were interested in continuing the dialogue.

Mission of DDG-

- Provide skill building for students.
- Identify the issues that divide the community in order to address them.
- First, the group asked the question- Where is the interest?
- Found that the core interest was in the students and faculty in the International Peace and Conflict

Resolution Program.

- Also found that there was an interest in student life office.
- Next, they asked-How do we build commitment?
- Institutionalized themselves as a student organization.
- There were three main components of the organization: board, student participants, and facilitators.
- Met with professors to see if they would include dialogue as a part of their curriculum. Arranged for students to receive credit for dialogue participation through certain classes.
- Recruited student participants through fliers on student boards and university list-servs; short inclass presentations; and DDG's student organization meetings.
- Drew people in by doing one session dialogues to get them acquainted to the process.
- Met with other student leaders around campus to get their group members involved.
- Used one session dialogues to peak interest in the sustained dialogue.

DDG's Process-

- There are many approaches to dialogue: community building, conflict resolution, etc.
- Part of AU's process is teaching/educating about dialogue and also participating in the dialogue.
- Facilitators are generally not content experts on the dialogue topic.
- AU hasn't necessarily had an inter-group dialogue-it is more like a collective critical inquiry.
- They don't introduce content/literature at the beginning-but let it grow out of the dialogue organically.
- Some of content is experimental, for example, having the women in the interfaith dialogue wear a scarf that Muslim women wear in order to have that 'experience' and talk about their feelings around it.

Outcome-

- Evaluation is the key to the sustained dialogue programs in order to effectively advocate for

program.

- Strengths of sustained dialogue
 - * Sense of ownership
 - * Higher awareness of biases and prejudices
 - * High level of safety
 - * Building an area of competence in the IPCR Program.
 - * Building a cadre of trained facilitators
- Weaknesses
 - * Structure and content could have been stronger
 - * Getting more diversity in the sessions among participants.
 - * Getting participation from students of color.
- Future- growing the program requires funds, campus/University commitment. Also looking to institutionalize the program by developing more courses / seminars for credit.

Questions:

Does tying dialogue to academics make the students resistant to dialogue?

How do you balance personal experiences with the larger context?